1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

Uru *warugu* should carry game and honey for the men of Morane and Unapane.

Some of the village Veddas of those days had cloth, and when dancing to the *yaku* they wore the long cloth garment called *kangalla*; the wilder Veddas had no cloth and wore leaves, but it was not clear whether they had not also a certain amount of bark cloth which was their ordinary covering, and leaves may have been worn in addition when they invoked the *yaku*[1].

The old man knew of the custom of a man keeping a piece of human liver in his betel pouch; it was universal and in his young days every Vedda desired to have a piece. Strangers, even Veddas, who intruded on the hunting grounds would be killed and their liver taken, no other part of the dead man being used, and the custom gave rise neither to warfare nor to vendettas[2].

Caves in which a death occurred were deserted, the corpse being covered with leaves; perhaps men very near dissolution were left before death had actually occurred, but this did not seem certain. Bones found in the cave when the group returned to it after an interval of some ten or twelve years were thrown away quite carelessly. The spirits of the dead became the Nae Yaku who, with Kande Yaka and Bilindi Yaka, gave game and prosperity. The *kirikoraha* ceremony was performed for the Nae Yaku, and *adukku* (cooked food), which even in the old days consisted of coconut and rice, was offered to them. The wilder Veddas gave nothing to the Buddhist priests and made no offerings at shrines, nor did they know the Kataragam God, Kanda Swami, though the village Veddas worshipped him and knew that Walliame had been taken to wife by him, and honey was presented to the goddess at certain shrines, especially one at Kokote Sila, frequented by the village Veddas.

A few of the village Veddas would dance for the Sinhalese in order to protect their cattle, bring prosperity to their villages, and secure them from epidemics; they would dance *kolamaduwa* which the old man pointed out was derived from a

[1] Cf. p. 213.
[2] For details of this custom see Chapter VIII.

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION

764 WHEN a man or woman dies from sickness the body is left in the cave or rock-shelter in which death took place. The body is not washed, dressed or ornamented in any way but is generally allowed to lie in the natural supine position and is covered with leaves and branches.

This was formerly the universal custom and still persists among the less sophisticated Veddas, who sometimes in addition place a large stone upon the chest of the dead man. This old custom, for which no reason could be given, is still observed at Sitala Wanniya where the body is still covered with branches and left where death has occurred. As soon as these matters 768 are attended to, and it seemed that they are carried through as quickly as possible after death, the small community leaves the cave or place in which the death has occurred and avoids it for a long time. It was sometimes stated that its members would never return, but we know of at least two cases in which sons returned to the cave in which their fathers died after many years, and we have no doubt that this statement means no more than that no one approached the cave for a long time. It was always difficult to obtain even a crude estimate of the lapse of time between events, but there was some reason to believe that in one of the two instances the shelter in which death occurred was untenanted for about twelve years. In any event it is certain that Veddas did return to caves in which a death had occurred, and that if any bones were left, no difficulty was made about picking these up and casting them into the jungle[1].

[764]

[1] This accords with the experience of the Drs Sarasin who say:—"We never found the least difficulty when collecting skeletons of Veddas. They [the Veddas]

[P. 122]

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

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It should be mentioned that no fire was lit near the corpse or water left by it when the living deserted the cave. Among the majority, including the two wildest groups of Veddas, there is no avoidance of any of the property of the dead man, and the contents of his betel bag would be eaten directly after his death, but among the members of another group of Veddas (Henebedda), who must be regarded as pure-blooded although their system of magic shows Sinhalese influence, the betel bag, unless it were a very good one, would be left with the corpse, and in any case its contents would not be eaten, but left near the dead man. The areca nut cutter and lime box, which during life were always carried in the bag, would not be left with the corpse, but before they were used by the living, measures were taken of which the avowed design was to render these objects harmless. Thus the old headman of the Henebedda Veddas exposed his father's lime box and areca cutters under a bush for a period which was certainly longer than ten but probably less than thirty days. It was necessary to do this, since if these objects had been used immediately, the individuals using them would probably have contracted the same illness as that from which the dead man suffered, and on further questioning the old man explained that the *yaka* producing the illness from which his father had died would for some time, and in some way which he could not define, remain connected with the chewing apparatus which the dead man had used constantly during his last illness.

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[753]

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At Bandaraduwa we were able to ascertain what was done after the death of a man named Tuta which had occurred in a neighbouring settlement two days before our arrival. The grave was dug by two of the man's brothers who carried the body to it; nothing was buried in the grave, not even the dead man's

were always ready to show us the place in which...they had buried. When we proceeded to dig up the skeleton they for the most part looked on with interest and without showing the least sign of excitement, and when it was necessary to pick all the small hand and feet bones out of the sandy soil they were perfectly ready to assist. We were always told willingly who was buried in a particular spot. The place of burial was always shown us by the relatives of the deceased...thus in Mudugala near Ouvani a father showed us the grave of his daughter and in the Nilgala district a son led us to the grave of his father." *Op. cit.* p. 494.)

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

764 betel pouch, although he had lain with it supporting his head during his last illness which was by no means short, but on the contrary it was kept in the house and its contents were immediately used. No water was left on the grave nor was a fire lit, nor could we discover that the two men who carried the body to the grave washed or in any way purified themselves.

Among the village Veddas of Omuni who have much Sinhalese blood, though culturally they appear to owe more to the Tamils of the east coast than to the Sinhalese, it was stated that the betel pouch and its contents would be buried beneath the head of the dead man and a coconut shell of water placed by his side. These people, who settled some seventy years ago, as Tennant records[1], knew only of leaving the body in the cave as a custom practised long ago by their ancestors, and there is no doubt that the adults of the present generation have seen nothing except burial in graves probably conducted in much the same manner as that practised by the surrounding Sinhalese.

The Omuni Veddas mentioned two interesting points with regard to burial. It should not take place in the immediate neighbourhood of any of their scanty and primitive chena cultivations, and the grave should be at least as far from the village as it was possible to hear a "Hoo" cry.

An even more advanced stage of care for the dead has been described by the Sarasins in the case of a "Culture Vedda" whose grave they opened. Unfortunately it is not said in what part of the country this grave was situated, though from the description given it is clear that the burial was recent. "A small structure (*gerust*) was built over one such grave upon which a coconut leaf was laid, and at each corner of the erection was tied the inflorescence of a coconut palm. At the head of the grave lay three open coconuts and a small heap of wood, at the foot an opened and an untouched coconut. Three cacti were planted on the grave, one at the head, one in the middle and one at the foot. The grave was three or four feet deep....The body which was that of a woman was wrapped in much cloth and had on it a necklace of glass beads...."

The authorities quoted further note that bows, arrows, axes,

[1] *Ceylon*, London 1859, Vol. II, pp. 446 and 447.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

betel bags and strike-a-lights may all be buried in the graves of male "Culture Veddas," and in one such grave they even found bullets[1].

When an attempt is made to discover the nature of the noxious influence felt in the place of death, the usual answer given is to the effect that "if we stayed where the death had occurred we should be pelted with stones." Further questions made it clear that in many instances there was no definite idea that some part of the dead man was the active agent in the stone-throwing; on the other hand some Veddas, and these as far as we could judge some of the least contaminated, definitely believed that it was the spirit or *yaka* of the dead man who would cause stones to rain on anybody staying near the corpse. And in this instance it was admittedly fear of the spirit of the dead individual that caused them to hurry from the site of death. Stone-throwing is the usual method by which the *yaku* show their displeasure, using *yaku* in the broadest sense, and by no means limiting this term to the spirits of the recent dead. It was clear that during certain disturbances described as "stone-throwing" no actual rocks or stones were moved or fell, and this was recognised by the Veddas who, however, continued to speak of the upheaval as "stone-throwing," which they ascribed to annoyance felt by the *yaku*. In one instance it was possible to say that the aggrieved *yaku* were not those of the recent dead. While camping within a couple of hundred yards of the Bendiyagalge caves in that part of the Uva jungle known as Henebedda we were startled between eleven and twelve one night by a deep groaning sound of considerable volume which was immediately followed by an outcry from the caves. Men shouted, women and children cried out, and every dog in the settlement howled its loudest. The noise which alarmed the cave occurred only once, and can hardly have lasted for more than ten seconds, but the chatter of people and the howling of dogs must have continued for about a quarter of an hour. We are entirely unable to state the cause of the noise, but suppose that it was due to one rock slipping upon another, or to the splitting of a mass of rock below the surface of the

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 494.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

Even Nevill missed the essentials of the Vedda cult of the dead, though he shows that he knew something of what actually occurred. "The Vaedda religion seems to have been such that the spirit alone was recognised as human, and the flesh, when the spirit has left it, receives neither veneration nor superstitious reverence. Where the life left the body, there the body was left....Two or five days after the death, however, the relations were invited to the scene of funeral and a feast was held...to satisfy relations there had been no foul play....

"The Vaeddas of Bintenne, however, having assembled relations and neighbours, procure rice, or other grain, and decorate the pot in which it is cooked with sprays of the liniya tree[1], a shrub with leaves like our hazel, but with bright scarlet flowers. If no flowers can be got, bits of red cotton or other cloth should be used. The celebrant then dances round the pot of food, with an arrow in his hand, singing any chant he knows, and making obeisance to the food by a wave of the arrow. The food is then distributed....

"It is evident this custom cannot apply to those who formerly did not eat grain. These, however, were few. Roasted game would probably with such take the place of grain, and the latter seems only used as the best and most unusual food procurable, much as our poor try to provide cake, and not bread and cheese, etc. at weddings....

"Bodies were never buried until the English Government endeavoured to enforce burial. The Vaeddas have not the least objection to the corpse being buried, but object greatly to being forced to dig the grave...[2]."

Although the Sarasins underestimated the importance of the Vedda cult of the dead, and failed to discover that even "Nature" Veddas make offerings to the spirits of their departed, their opinions and conclusions are necessarily given at some length on account of the undoubted importance of their work. "The Veddas of Dewilane told us that after death they became spirits or yakas, but as to whether these persisted (*lebten*) or not they never thought; they did not pray to them nor honour them. The 'Nature' Veddas from Danigala...told us in 1885

[1] *Helictera isora*, L. [2] *Taprobanian*, Vol. I, p. 179.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

motions, once more put their arms round them, soon after which the dancers fell limply into their arms. The leader of the dance seemed especially excited at this stage and, trembling and quivering all over, stood back to the pole and wildly waved his scarf in the air. Soon his movements became less vigorous, his head nodded on his shoulders and hung down on his chest as he addressed the other dancers in a harsh and broken voice (Plate LXXI). In view of the Vedda ceremonies which we subsequently saw we have no doubt that he prophesied good fortune. It appeared to us that this old man really presented the ordinary characteristics of Vedda "possession," i.e. the dance, though only a rehearsal, had produced the customary effects associated with it, and certainly this old man's muscles continued to quiver irregularly for some time after the dance was over. As for the remaining dancers we have no doubt that the dance remained for them as it had begun, simply a rehearsal and an amusing piece of acting.

Such dances are held only to cure sickness or in return for good crops, and it was emphatically denied that anything similar took place after childbirth or death.

Very little was elicited concerning death and mourning ceremonies. The corpse is washed, and it seemed that although this is usually done by a barber or *dhobie* (professional washerman) it might be done by one or more of the relatives of the dead man. The grave must be at some distance from the habitations of the living and also from their cultivation patches. No fire is lit on the grave. A feast is held a few days after burial, which appears to be called *bati bane*, and the food for this, especially rice, is provided by the near relatives of the dead man and distributed. A *kudaram* is built upon which the food is placed for "a short time" as an offering to Kapalpei, after which it is eaten by the assembled people.

This account agrees with that given by the Sarasins, who record that a coast Vedda, Pereman, when asked about his religion laughed and said they had that of the Tamils, they honoured their dead by cooking rice in front of their house, folding their hands, saying a few words and then eating the rice. As they did this they spoke the name of the deceased and said: 'Help

5: Spittal D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

tail through a dorsal slit, partially separating the muscle mass from the caudal vertebrae, and introducing into the space thus formed strips of fat from the animal's flank; the skin is then sewn over with bast strip and thorn, and the stuffed tail is roasted on embers and eaten forthwith, or smoked and put by for future use. 252 262 251

Young hornbills being full of fat are a special Vedda delicacy; nor is the helpless imprisoned mother spared. Even more cruel is the treatment by these merciless epicures of the young of the edible-nest swiftlet. I asked Kauwa what he did with these when out nesting. "Eat them," he said; "the eggs are small but tasty; and so are the young which cry 'ki-ki-ki' as we put them in the fire." 262

The Vedda custom of preserving venison in honey is well known. This is how it is done: Into a hollow in a rock a little honey is poured; to this is added a few pieces of venison cut up small (pork is unsuitable as the fat prevents permeation); more honey is then poured on, and more meat added; and so layer by layer, till honey and meat are well intermingled. A protecting slab is then placed over the mouth of the hole. 251

Boa fat is said to be good for fractures; the broken limb being wrapped in *riti* bark or cloth saturated with the heated oil. They say it takes a month and a half for a fracture to heal; and in this, show more good sense than certain credulous Sinhalese who assure one that their *vedaralas* can cure a fracture in the time it takes a pot of rice to boil! 752

Kauwa had many charms against wild beasts. The one for buffaloes made them bleed from mouth and nose and fall dead! If you saw a bear you should *think* the appropriate charm and tie a knot in your hair; only if the animal attacked should you shout the words. For the leopard, he had no charm: "Cha, what's the use of that," he said; "the animal is more frightened of us than we of him." 777

Of Vedda heroes, there was Yapal whose voice could be heard a hundred miles; and Balagala-seya whose arm was like a tree, who carried a bow the girth of a man's thigh, and whose arrow would go through anything; in yonder Balagala rock he lived. 773

Their dead they cover with leaves and abandon where they die, or deposit in shallow graves covered over with earth and thorns to keep the pigs away. 764

Kauwa never bathed; he confirmed the assertion by rubbing rolls of dirt off his abdomen. "Does your wife not complain," we asked. "If she did," was the characteristic reply, "I would strike her with my axe-head, and ask her why she did not think of that when she came to me." 515

Vedda nuptials are not burdened with ritual: A prospective husband, having gained the consent of the girl's parents, returns a few days later, it may be with a friend, and perhaps a monitor or two. Placing his bow and arrows on the roof of the hut, he enters. All partake of the feast of lizards and yams; the girl, seated next to her man, doles out his food, not partaking of a morsel until he has fed, and she has given him a chew of betel and water to wash his hands. The man usually throws in his lot with his father-in-law, but sometimes he takes the girl away, leaving a couple of arrows behind in exchange. The girl's parents may accompany them some distance saying by way of adieu, "Take our child and keep her well." In custom we may differ from these wild and simple folk, but in affection and solicitude are one. 583 585 591

2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

The
162 race is rapidly becoming extinct; large families are all but un-
163 known, and longevity is very rare. I have been at some pains to obtain reliable data to elucidate these points. Out of seventy-two Veddahs in Nilgala, fifty were adults, twenty-two children. In one small sept, or family, there were nine adults and one child; in another, one child and eight adults; and so on. In Bintenne, out of three hundred and eight Veddahs, a hundred and seventy-five were adults, a hundred and thirty-three children. Here the disproportion is not so marked; but in one of the smaller tribes, more isolated than the rest, there were twenty adults and but four children.

The paucity of children, I think, must be ascribed to the degeneracy produced by such close intermarriages, for I have never heard a suspicion of infanticide existing among them.* Out of
[847] fifty adults in Nilgala, only one appeared to have numbered seventy years, and but eight to have exceeded fifty. In Bintenne, of a hundred and seventy-five adults, two only seemed to have reached their seventieth, and but fourteen to have exceeded their fiftieth years. Such statistics seem to show the practical results of such connections. The Nilgala Veddahs, who still maintain an almost total isolation from other people, are rapidly disappearing.† The Veddahs of Bintenne, who have abandoned the pernicious custom which I have described, and still intermarry among themselves, are becoming extinct, though more gradually.

[852] The Veddahs have no ceremonies at the birth of a child, nor
164 when the name is given; and though, in Bintenne, they have long buried and mourned their dead, those of Nilgala have only commenced, in this generation, to do either.

Till very recently the dead man was left where he died. The survivors covered the body with leaves, put a heavy stone upon its chest, and sought some other cave, leaving that in which the death occurred to the spirit of the deceased. They still desert the scene of the death, and the bones, constantly found in good preservation in the caves of Nilgala, prove how recently the practice of leaving the body unburied has been abandoned.

000 Tennent says, truly, that they have "no system of caste among

* It certainly was practised among the Kandyans, but never, I think, to any great extent. I have, however, seen two persons who, when infants, were buried alive by their mothers, and rescued.

† Knox speaks, page 62, of Veddahs, "who lived about Hourly, the remotest of the king's dominions," who were "pretty tame," and used "to come and buy and sell among the people," who resented "being pressed to serve the king" in some expedition, and so "removed further into the woods and would be seen no more." "Hourly" is evidently the village of "Oure-oola," on the furthest boundary of the Nilgala district, which, though, as tradition has it, it was once peopled by Veddahs, is now exclusively inhabited by Singhalese.